The Ivory Flute

By ALDIS DUNBAR

From the cool darkness of Mirza Achmet's inner court, Thomassin passed out to meet the glare and commotion of the bazaar. For a breath of time he paused in the shadow, letting his eyes become accustomed to the brightness.

Everywhere was vivid, swirling color. Sight was dazzled by the constant sway of the crowd—the ever-varying succession of blue, red, intense green, saffron shot with silver.

Paulet and Hira Singh had returned direct to th hotel, but Philip Thomassin, allured by that which was to them the veriest commonplace, sauntered serenely through the bazaar, toward the wider space within the open city gate.

As he stood there, a little aside from the stream of traffic, a new sound broke on his ears. Turning, he saw, in an open space before the low shops, two figures, until now unnoticed. One was a boy, dark and impassive of expression, his clothes tattered and faded.

Thomassin went closer to see. The liquid notes rose and fell, first loud and cheerful, then slower, more soft, slipping almost imperceptibly into the monotonous chant of the snake-charmers. The flute—unlike any that he had ever happened to notice—was of ivory, with a row of turquoises set in a band of gold that twisted entirely around it from one end to the other. While he looked at it curiously, standing in the full blaze of the sunlight, something—a faint flash as of a mirror—drew his attention to the second figure. In a low, arched doorway stood a tall man, wrapped in a dull gray cloak. On his head was a green turban, with tarnished golden fringe hanging about it. His eyes, deep-set and compelling, sought those of the young Englishman.

The music ceased with a low wail; the player held out his hand, its thin fingers curved in appeal. Thomassin, half heeding the whisper of "Sahib, sahib!" from the lad, yet unable to draw his attention from the man in the gray cloak, dropped a small coin into the waiting palm, and walked across to the shop, stepping aside to avoid falling over a sprawling brown baby, whose mother had set it down while she bargained for a handful of gaudy sweetmeats, paying down their price with feigned reluctance.

The ring on his finger—the finest seal in Mirza Achmet's collection—was too tight. It made his hand throb and burn. The shop was that of a working goldsmith. When he reached it, the man in gray was sitting inside, twisting some gold wire into a bracelet like those worn by the women of the district.

"The sahib's ring is too small?" he asked, in a low, rather dull voice. Thomassin nodded, holding out his sun-burned hand. The jeweller took up a little guage.

"It should be stretched two sizes larger. Will the sahib be seated while I make it right for him?" Again Thomassin assented, this time almost wearily. He dropped down on the waiting pile of cushions with a sense of relief. The place was so quiet. Only a single ray of sunshine through a crevice in the roof, falling athwart his hand and glinting on the handsome sapphire that Paulet had pronounced flawless. And Mark Paulet knew. Had he not lived for nine years in Surajpore, learning to know the people around him, taught by Hira Singh, more comrade than retainer?

A sudden glare in his eyes brought him to his feet with a start. The hot sun shone on him as he stood there in the open space before the Lahore gate. The flute-player was gone. The naked baby still sprawled at his feet; its mother was still counting out the few coins from her scanty store. Where were the jeweller and his shop?

Thomassin could not repress a cry of amazement, and all faces turned toward him. A little nut-colored policeman—elaborately uniformed—ran up.

"Has the sahib lost something?" he inquired with deference, having seen Thomassin in the company of Mark Paulet.

"My seal ring," gasped Thomassin. "I went into the gold smith's shop, over there—" but the wizened face expressed only polite incredulity.

"Where, sahib? This is not the jewelers' quarter. No goldsmith has his shop between the Lahore gate and the house of Mirza Achmet, the jewel merchant. Moreover, the sahib has been standing quite still—perfectlee—and not moving."

Thomassin's temper rose in a sudden gust. He had been tricked in some manner, and the swindler, in league with these people, was escaping, while he was delayed by them.

"I tell you I went into a shop—over there" (pointing toward the uneven wall),—"to have my ring altered."

A chatter of voices uprose.

"No shop is. Only a wall."

"Never was shop there in Surajpore!"

"The sahib took no step back or forward since giving money to the flute player."

"Ha!" exclaimed the diminutive official. "May be the flute boy is thief!" But Thomassin shook his head.

"I had the ring after I gave him the money and walked away. What do you call him? Paulet Sahib will get to the bottom of this affair." He strode toward the big pink hotel in a rage, followed by the policeman, if possible, more deferential than before at the name of "Paulet Sahib."

The gossiping groups melted away; the veiled woman lifted the cooing baby to her hip and shuffled out of sight; a caravan from the south filled up the gate, and the new interest it created drove the thought of the mad English sahib from the minds of the loungers in the bazaar.

But on the cool veranda of the "Queen's Hotel" an angry young Hercules with flashing blue eyes and close cropped fair hair, and a very small and tawny policeman with many gilt buttons and yards of braid on his otherwise shabby blue uniform, were interrupting each other in vain endeavors to pour a clear and consecutive story into the ears of "Paulet Sahib."

"You say that the ring was still on your finger after the boy had gone?" asked the quiet voice, stilling the confusion.

"Yes," averred Thomassin. "It was so tight that I could scarcely endure the pressure. I couldn't be mistaken about that, you know."

"And the man—the one with the green turban. Did you see him leaning against the wall, Abdallah?"

It straightway appeared that Thomassin alone had paid any attention to the man.

"Then find the boy, son of a bat," commanded Paulet. "If he is not in the jail by sunset, there shall be fines and cutting off of gilded buttons. Give word to Mirza Achmet, for he must know that a wily thief is in Surajpore."

Abdallah, bowing to the earth, hastened out, almost colliding with a stout little man in a pith helmet, who was talking vehemently to Hira Singh.

"'Twasn't the value of the thing, I tell you. It was the association. Why, it belonged to my great grandfather, Sir Anthony Garth, Vice-Admiral of the Red. I never allowed it to leave my finger."

"What's up, Garth?" asked Paulet, as he and Thomassin looked around in surprise.

"I've lost my ring. That big yellow diamond I was showing you." Thomassin caught his breath, but Paulet laid an imperative hand on his arm.

"How did it happen?" he asked.

"Why, it was right outside here. I stopped to listen to a street musician, and when I tossed him a shilling I noticed that my hand had a smear of fresh paint on it. I went into a shop, and the man gave me a cloth to wipe it on. And—" he paused and gulped—"I don't know where the ring went, but go it did. What's more," working himself up into a rubicund passion, "the lazy beggars around swore that I hadn't gone into any shop. That there hadn't ever been a sign of a shop near there. And there wasn't a sign of paint on my hand, either!"

It was a year later. Paulet, worn with work in the famine district, had been given three months leave. There was nothing to take him to England, so he left the steamer at Naples and traveled slowly northward—he and his friend.

At last the two—the wiry, quiet officer and his tall, dark companion—saw the miracle of Italian spring on the banks of the Arno, and rested from wandering.

One day they were exploring a narrow street in the oldest quarter of the city, Paulet pointing out the quaint carvings on the dark, overhanging walls to Hira Singh, when a strain of music, oddly familiar, trembled in the air. The face of the hill man lighted up.

"That is home sound, Paulet Sahib. Who in this land can play the chant of the snake-charmer?"

Paulet, catching his arm, drew him forward in pursuit. A moment later they came out into a little lonely square, with a moss-covered fountain in the center. Here half a dozen children were gathered about a boy, whose tattered garments were of a fashion that filled them with wonder. He was playing mournfully, slowly. But Hira Singh drew back.

"Look, sahib! The ivory flute!"

Paulet considered silently, then raised his head.

"See here, Hira Singh. Will you do exactly as I say? We'll bag this pair of rascals."

"I am the sahib's man," was the firm reply, as a look of devotion illumined the dark eyes.

"Hark, then. Don't listen to the boy. I am going to put on this ring," he drew a heavily chased gold band from his pocket, and slipped it on his finger. "I shall let the boy see it. You follow at one side. In the moment that I give him a piece of money, note where I am looking. If a man stands there, grasp and hold him fast. I shall take care of the boy."

Without another word, he strolled out into the little strip of light near the fountain. As the boy saw him, the tones of the flute swelled again.

Hira Singh, watching every motion, saw Paulet stop, gazing fixedly at the wall of the church. Behind a buttress crouched a gray-clad figure. The fold of a green turban showed dimly in the half light. Slowly Paulet's hand moved to his pocket. With a step like that of a panther, the lithe, agile hill-man stole along the wall, and as Paulet seized the cowering musician, there was a spring, a muffled outcry, then a grim struggle under the walls of the gray old church.

The terrified children fled, clinging to each other in terror, to bring help but it was soon over. The flute-player and his companion were secured Hira Singh, willing to take no chances, tore the green turban from the shaven head it covered, and bound its owner's arms behind him. Paulet looked at the captives with interest.

"Where is the sapphire seal ring that you stole in Surajpore?" he asked, in Urdu.

"Allah knows, or Rasalu, there," muttered the boy, sullenly.

"And the yellow diamond of Garth Sahib?" turning to the one called Rasalu. The swarthy face twisted in a mocking grin.

"If I tell the sahib, will he let All go free? I did it all. He but played the flute at my bidding."

"Prove that, and we shall see," answered Paulet. "Where is my ring?"

"In my sash," was Ali's sulky reply. Paulet, searching, returned it to his pocket.

"Nevertheless," put in Rasalu, eagerly, "I did it. Hearken, sahib. When he plays on the ivory flute, all must listen. Then I look steadily at the one who has a ring of price. He sees me, and what I will is reflected in his mind. Ali, seeing that he is mine, stops playing, receiving the ring from the one who gives it, thinking it a piece of money from his purse. Hai! Many a time! I give him to believe that he comes near me with the ring afterward, while Ali slips out of sight. It lasts but a moment. Then we are both gone and he has not moved. Few men would believe, but you know truth, sahib. You know India."

TREASURE HUNTERS IN MAINE

How the Coast Has Been Dug Over in the Vain Search for Capt. Kidd's Gold.

"There are more than a score of spots along the coast of eastern Maine where Capt. Kidd is said to have buried his treasure previous to his disastrous voyage to the coast of east Africa," said F. R. Johnson of Wiscasset, Me.

"One of the spots where Capt. Kidd is said to have buried treasure is in Musselridge channel, at a point 600 rods toward the South Thomaston shore from Twobush island, and in the center of a triangle formed by drawing a straight line from Twobush to Owl's Head and a third back to the starting point at White Head.

"Hundreds of men in boats have dredged and dragged the waters about this spot for a century or longer, and if any one has found wealth from the labor the fact is not circulated widely, though the fishermen and clam diggers continue to labor and hope in spite of many discouragements.

"The second place fixed upon as the burial spot of pirate wealth is on Codlead marsh, where Marsh creek joins Penobscot river, six miles inland from its junction with Penobscot bay. This place is about 30 feet above the surface of the salt marsh in its highest place and holds about two acres of land. Though it was originally clad in woods, the anxiety of the treasure seekers has been so great that not only have the trees been cut away and used for fuel by the hunters who have camped on the spot, but the soil, thousands of tons in weight, has been shoveled over many times. It is estimated that enough earth has been handled by the campers of Codlead to build embankments and fill cuts for the grading of a railroad 20 miles in length. In other words, if the hunters for Kidd wealth had hired out with railroad contractors they could have earned $30,000 at regular rates instead of the few rusted and battered old coins which were discovered in the ground at that spot in 1798, and which have led to the wasting of so much human energy."

Wasn't He the Rudest Thing?

Vaudeville patrons, when not restrained, are at times likely to grow peevish if a performer, known to receive a large salary, does not entertain in proportion to the money paid by the manager for the act. An instance of this was supplied the other day at Hammerstein's when Bessie De Voie brought to a close her season of one consecutive week in vaudeville.

Miss De Voie looked quite nice and might be said to have presented a neat dancing act, but it was generally admitted that she could not be regarded as entitled to a four figure salary.

Following her dancing imitation of how a soldier went "Marching Through Georgia," Dr. Herman stepped to the footlights and announced that he was ready to electrify any one who might apply.

"Does any lady wish to be electrified?" asked the doctor.

A rude patron in the rear of the house, who had failed to see anything in Miss De Voie's act demanding applause from him, shouted out:

"Why not electrify Bessie?"—New York Morning Telegraph.

Had to Win Her Way.

Miss Evalyn B. Longman, whose figure of Victory surmounted the dome of Festival hall at the Louisiana Purchase exhibition, was the youngest of six children of an Ohio family. She worked as a clerk for several years in a Chicago wholesale house and, having saved $265, went to Olivet college, in Michigan, to study art. When that was gone she went back to work in Chicago, but finally, after two more years of drudgery, resolved to go to New York, arriving there with but $40 in her pocket. She finally got into the studio of Daniel C. French, and from that time her rise was rapid. She was awarded the bronze doors for the Naval academy's memorial chapel.

A Gift to Bryn Mawr.

Miss Cynthia M. Wesson of Springfield, Mass., has given $7,000 to Bryn Mawr college. Miss Wesson, who was graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1909, was prominent in the athletic affairs of the institution, and her gift is to be expended toward the betterment of the swimming pool. All undergraduates are required to qualify as swimmers, as the exercise is one of the most popular of the college sports.

Doubtful.

A teacher was telling a class at school on a recent Sunday about the deluge, remarking:

"And then it rained for 40 days and 40 nights.

Then a little boy asked: "Were the farmers satisfied then, miss?"—Tit-bits.

Impaired Dignity.

"Why is a man never a hero to his valet?"

"Probably because his valet sees him in the slippers, smoking cap and lounging jacket that he got for Christmas."—Washington Star.

No matter what his rank or position may be, the lover of books is the richest and the happiest of the children of men.—Langford.

It is easier for men to get on financially than it is for women to get off a car forward.

And a lot of good resolutions are manufactured the morning after.

Too many eye-openers are apt to make a man see double.

Anything is wrong that is almost right.

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